

REFORMING THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION THROUGH E-GOVERNMENT GENERALIZATION

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Rezumat

Lucrarea reliefează rolul e-guvernării ca principală modalitate de reformare a serviciilor publice din România. E-guvernarea este o componentă esențială a noii societăți informaționale și a cunoașterii, având în ultimii ani o evoluție exponențială la nivelul Uniunii Europene. Rezultatele acestui studiu relevă faptul că e-guvernarea este principala modalitate de reformare a administrației publice. În plus, este necesară o dezvoltare continuă a serviciilor de e-guvernare dacă se dorește schimbarea modului în care administrația publică interacționează cu cetățenii sau companiile. Studiul a fost realizat prin cercetarea unui bogat material bibliografic, incluzând rapoarte, reglementări, precum și experiența națională privind dezvoltarea serviciilor de e-guvernare. Concluziile acestui studiu justifică efortul de dezvoltare a e-guvernării și de asemenea, oferă multiple repere pentru factorii de decizie din administrația publică românească.

Cuvinte cheie: e-guvernare, administrație publică, reformă, servicii publice, internet

Abstract

The paper outlines the role of e-government as the main action in order to reform Romanian public services. E-government is a critical constituent of the new information and knowledge-based society and in the last few years had an exponential evolution at the European Unions' level. The findings of this study disclose that e-government is the main action to reform public services. Moreover, an advanced level of e-government services development is needed in order to transform the interactions between public administration and citizens or businesses. The study was conducted by combining a wide variety of sources, such as reports, regulations, and the national experience in developing e-government services. Our conclusion justifies the effort invested in developing e-government and also has relevance for policy making in Romanian public administration.

Keywords: E-Government, Public Administration, Reform, Public Services, Internet

JEL Classification: D73, H11, H70, H83, L80, O14, O33

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays information technology and internet are deeply transforming public administration. In the digital era, public administration has a direct contact with citizens and businesses and is responsible for providing a range of basic services. The manner in which public services are provided is a highly debated topic these days because of their role within the process of reforming public administration. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how e-government services have developed in Romania and what actions should be taken further to improve public administration.

The research was conducted using evidence provided by a set of policy documents (such as reports and regulations) as well as research articles and Romanian experience in developing the e-government services. The research question was answered by analyzing published sources, evaluating and interpreting evidence. Answering the research question was difficult because some e-government services are still in their incipient stages of development while other are very sophisticated.

2. BACKGROUND

The term e-government itself is of comparatively recent origin and even the oldest dedicated e-government policies and events only date from the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the practice behind it is much older and goes back to the first, mainframe-centred wave of data processing in the public sector in the 1960s and 1970s that frequently continues to shape existing information technology infrastructures (European Committee for Standardization - CEN, 2008). Today e-government means the use of tools and systems made available by information and communication technologies in order to provide better public services to citizens and businesses and to make public administrations more efficient and effective. Implemented well, e-government enables all citizens, enterprises and organisations to carry out their business with government more easily, more quickly and at lower cost (European Commission, 2005a, 2005b).

The governments are very interested in the new technologies and in the electronic services. Even if the new technologies are the ones that allow the implementation of electronic government, it shouldn't be forgotten that this involves major changes, both within public institutions and in the way citizens are served. The development of electronic government applications directly depends on the internet access. Still, using these applications is also dependent on education and on changing mentalities, and successful implementation of these applications determines the acceptance and their impact within the modern society. The degree of satisfaction among citizens is directly correlated with their expectation regarding the public service. In this respect, public services should be at least as performing as the ones from the private sector. Therefore, the governments pay a higher attention to the citizens' needs when they modernize or change the offered services. Nowadays citizens ask for better services, higher security and democracy, while the business environment asks for the reduction of bureaucracy and an increased efficiency (European Commission, 2006). Electronic government (e-government) services can bring an important contribution to overcoming these challenges. For that reason the development of electronic government services is very important.

3. E-GOVERNMENT IN ROMANIA

In Romania, e-government registered lately a noticeable development, at least at the level of existence, determined by the legislation. The National Electronic System is still at the level of quantitative development. However, there are some good premises for the development of e-government services in Romania, such as: (a) the number of internet providers is raising; (b) the number of households and enterprises with internet access is growing; and (c) the citizens/the businesses are using the internet for interacting with public authorities (Eurostat, 2008).

There are 20 basic public services provided online in Romania, divided into two major categories: (a) public services for citizens and (b) public services for businesses.

The *public services for citizens* and their web sites are the following: (1) income taxes: declaration, notification (<http://formulare.e-guvernare.ro/Forms/default.aspx>); (2) services for finding a job through workforce institutions (<http://www.anofm.ro>, <http://www.semm.ro>); (3) social protection (security) services: unemployment benefits, child allowances, medical care costs, student grants (<http://www.mmssf.ro>, <http://www.anofm.ro>, <http://www.mmssf.ro>, <http://sas.mmssf.ro>, <http://formulare.e-guvernare.ro/Forms/default.aspx>, <http://www.edu.ro>); (4) personal documents (passport, ID card, driving license) (<http://www.pasapoarte.mai.gov.ro/>, <http://www.mai.gov.ro/>, www.mira.gov.ro/Home/index.htm); (5) car registration (www.mira.gov.ro/Home/index.htm - section Util); (6) application for building permission; (7) police declarations (<http://www.politiaromana.ro>); (8) public libraries (online catalogues, searching instruments) (<http://www.cultura.ro>); (9) certificates (birth certificates, marriage certificates): deposition, remission (<http://www.mai.gov.ro/>); (10) higher education or other forms of education registration (<http://www.edu.ro>); (11) announcing the authorities with regard to address changes (<http://www.mai.gov.ro/>); and (12) health-related services (www.ms.ro) (Wauters et al., 2007:12-13; European Commission, 2008a; European Commission, 2008b).

The *public services for businesses* and their web sites are the following: (1) social contributions for employees (<https://formularunic.e-guvernare.ro/> for large contributors, www.anaf.ro for other contributors); (2) corporate tax: declarations, notifications (<https://formularunic.e-guvernare.ro/>, for large contributors, www.anaf.ro, for other contributors); (3) VAT: declarations, notifications (<https://formularunic.e-guvernare.ro/>, for large contributors, www.anaf.ro, for other contributors); (4) new companies registration (<http://www.onrc.ro/>, <http://recom.onrc.ro/index.htm>); (5) data submission to statistical offices (www.insse.ro); (6) customs declaration; (7) environment-related permits (<http://www.mmediu.ro>); and (8) public procurement (www.e-licitatie.ro) (Wauters et al., 2007:12-13; European Commission, 2008a; European Commission, 2008b).

The evaluation of these services will be really possible only if the number of service users and the number of transactions will be known, and especially, if the comparison between the level of using the electronic service and the classic one will be possible. This is how the real efficiency of this new working method of public administration can be measured and future projects will be based on that (Sumanariu and Vătășoiu Gogancea, 2006: 19-20).

Most of the Romanian public services are still in the first stage of development. Therefore, it is required for the government to take a series of measures for the development of intelligent and fashioned public services, from which the population, the companies and the public institutions will benefit. In this respect, the following actions could be taken in Romania: (a) to inform and to educate the employees of public administration institutions on one hand, and the users of electronic services on the other hand. This means to increase awareness regarding to the e-government solutions dedicated to public institutions and to offer information about security assurance and personal data protection, in order to increase the degree of trust in informatics systems; (b) to develop promotion campaigns both for the employees of public institutions and for the users of electronic services; this way people may understand the need of positive interaction with information technologies; (c) to apply training programs for the users of information and communication technologies, including both the employees of public institutions and the citizens, in their quality of final users of e-government solutions; (d) to develop the infrastructure at public administration level and to create the needed circumstances for citizens to be able to access public information; (e) to adopt a series of standards and recommendations regarding interconnections and interoperability of e-government, e-administration systems and their specific data bases; (f) to create flexible information systems, correlated with institutional structures from within the administration and especially with the relationship between them, so that there won't be major areas of redundancy; and (g) to constantly update the information systems, no matter if the changes that required the update are of legal, institutional, technical or economic nature.

The actions mentioned before could enhance the benefits of e-government both for public administration and for users. Among these benefits (Ionescu, 2005), there are: (1) reduction of public expenditure, of bureaucracy and corruption at public institution level; (2) increased transparency regarding the use and administration of public funds; (3) improved information and public service access, as per the laws regarding data protection and free access to public information; (4) removing the direct contact between civil servants and citizens/businesses; (5) providing information and high quality public services through electronic means; (6) increasing the administrative capacity of public institutions in order for them to fulfil their role and their objectives and to provide information and public services in a transparent way; (7) promoting the collaboration between public institutions to provide

public services through electronic means; (8) redefining the relationship between citizens and public administration, respectively between the business environment and public administration; and (9) promoting the use of internet and of new technologies within public institutions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that e-government is the main action to reform Romanian public services. In addition, an advanced level of e-government services development is needed in order to transform the interactions between public administration and citizens or businesses. This conclusion is based on the examination of the e-government services development in Romania. Even if there is a progress over the last years in the e-government field, the Romanian Government should take a series of measures in order to develop the e-government services, from which the population, the companies and the public institutions to benefit.

The conclusions of this study justify the effort invested in developing e-government and also have relevance for policy making in Romanian public administration. In addition, the results reported in this paper may be helpful for the experts within the public administration in order to implement the administrative reform process.

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